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Response Paper, Death of a Salesman

As seen in the first Act of Death of a Salesman, the father of the play, Willy, has obviously gone through something traumatizing in the past in order for him to be acting so strangely. Willy is talking to himself, thinking that he is talking to his sons. He was also not an ideal father to his children when they were young. It’s not that Willy was not an involved father, he just acted more like a friend to his children, especially to Biff, instead of being a true father-figure. There must have been something in Willy’s past that made him act like such a foolish father. I suspect that Willy did not have an ideal relationship with his father, therefore Willy is trying to hard to have a perfect relationship with his children when in actuality Willy is being an even worse parent than his father was to him because Willy is just acting like a friend to his children which isn’t preparing Biff and Happy to succeed in the real world.

When Bernard comes over to tell Biff that he must study with him or else he will fail his class, Willy doesn't even make Biff go study with Bernard. Willy just makes jokes about how Biff doesn't have to study, he will get scholarships and at the end of the conversation he proceeds to ask Biff, “ Bernard is not well-liked, is he?” (20). Willy is very ignorant and thinks that Biff will get scholarships everywhere so he doesn't have to get good grades. Therefore, instead of making his son study for his classes so he can get into a good college, he makes fun of the smart kids that try to help Biff study, and he proceeds to tell Biff, “Bernard can get the best marks in school, y’understand, but when he gets out into the business world, y’understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him” (20). Although what Willy is saying does get you far in life, you cannot just rely on your street smarts and the people you know to get you through life, you need to have a back up plan. Willy is not acting like the ideal father figure to Biff and that is what leads to Biff’s failure at finding a steady job in his future.

Willy must have had some troubling experience with his father when he was young. My theory is that his father either tried pushing him too hard with school in order to make sure Willy would be successful and since he was pushed too hard he ultimately hated his father. My other theory is that his father didn't care about Willy’s life at all, he was never involved in Willy’s life, and now Willy is trying to be in his children’s life even more than the average parent by being the “good guy”. Since Willy is acting more like a friend than a father figure to his children, his children will never be upset with him because he does not punish them, he acts just like a friend. Therefore Willy is idolized by his children when they are young because he seems like the cool dad but in the future being the cool dad will not be beneficial because he will not have prepared his children well for life after school, the real world.